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The Boundary between the British and the Russian Empires on the North-West Coast of America.

MEMOIR BY THE ST. PANCRAS FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE.

(From the "Diplomatic Review" (Free Press) for March, 1859.)

This year just closed has witnessed the erection of a British colony on the confines of Russia. Such a proximity might have been expected to awaken curiosity, if not vigilance, and to excite interest if not alarm. It has scarcely called forth a remark either in Parliament or the Press. A glance at the map shows, however, that in this carelessness Russia has not participated, but that she has spent as much care and thought on the North-West Coast of America as upon any of those portions of the earth where she has struggled for dominion or for existence. That glance will show the seaboard in the possession of Russia, and maritime England shut into the interior, and this by a cession, not of the interior to England, but of the coast to Russia. This coast, extending for three hundred miles, Russia, having secured, does not occupy. The names on the map are familiar and significant—Cross Sound, Prince of Wales Island, Mount Fairweather, and Admiralty Bay.

In 1822, a ukase was issued from St. Petersburg, declaring the North Pacific a close sea, and forbidding any foreign vessel to approach within one hundred miles of the coast. The ground taken was Russia's possession of the coasts, on the American side down to 51° north latitude, and on the Asiatic to 49°. This demand created in the United States alarm and indignation. The Government would have given way, but the people would not, and the project was set aside by the traders to that coast putting guns on board their vessels.

On the 17th of April, 1824, a Treaty was concluded between Russia and the United States:—

Art. I. declared the Pacific Ocean open.

Art. II. forbade either party to resort to any establishment of the other, without the permission of the Governor or Commander.

Art. III. forbade the Americans to make settlements north, or the Russians south of 54° 40'.

On the 28th of February, 1825, a similar Treaty was made between Russia and Great Britain:—

Art. I. and II. were the same as in the American Treaty.

Art. III. The line of demarcation between the possessions of the high contracting parties, upon the coast of the continent, and the islands of America to the north-west, shall be drawn in the manner following:—

"Commencing from the southernmost point of the island called Prince of Wales Island, which point lies in the parallel of 54° 40' north latitude, and between 131° and 133° west longitude (meridian of Greenwich), the said line shall ascend to the north, along the channel called Portland Channel, as far as the point of the continent where it strikes 56° north latitude; from the last-mentioned point, the line of demarcation shall follow the summit of the mountains situated parallel to the coast, as far as the point of intersection of 141° west longitude (of the same meridian); and, finally, from the said point of intersection, the said meridian line of 141°, in its prolongation as far as the Frozen Ocean, shall form the limit between the Russian and British possessions on the continent of America to the north-west."

Art. IX. With reference to the line of demarcation laid down in the preceding article, it is understood:—

"1st. That the island called Prince of Wales Island shall belong wholly to Russia.

"2ndly. That wherever the summit of the mountains which extend in a direction parallel to the coast, from 56° north latitude to the point of intersection of 141° west longitude, shall prove to be at the distance of more than ten marine leagues from the ocean, the limit between the British possessions and the line of coast which is to belong to Russia, as above mentioned, shall be formed by a line parallel to the windings of the coast, and which shall never exceed the distance of ten marine leagues therefrom."

Art. V. prohibits either party from making settlements within the boundaries of the other.

This treaty was negotiated by Sir STRATFORD CANNING, now Lord STRATFORD DE REDCLIFFE. He was first sent to the United States in 1820, and was appointed plenipotentiary in London in November, 1823, for negotiating with the United States concerning all the questions in dispute between the two countries, including that of the North-West Boundary. That Treaty, however, was not ratified. In April, 1824, the American treaty with Russia was signed, and in November of the same year he was sent to St. Petersburg, when he signed the treaty above quoted from, on the 28th of February, 1825.

Thus, Russia claimed a sea whose coast was not hers, and obtained the coast as the price of the surrender of the claim. She was equally powerless to obtain either demand by arms. By this encroachment, however, she gained much more than a position on the coast of America. The possession of New Archangel, in Sitka, is one of great importance when taken in relation with her acquisition of the Amoor and her encroachments in the northernmost of the islands of Japan, but a more immediate gain was the quarrel between England and the United States consequent on the treaties with these powers.

Russia had positively recognised England's claim to the territory south of 54° 40', but she had constructively recognised that territory

as belonging to the United States. Such a suggestion was quite sufficient to give to their lust of territory a definite aim, and when the treaty was on foot for the settlement of the boundary between the Pacific territories of Great Britain and the United States, the cry of the latter was not for treaty rights, or even for maritime or territorial advantages, but "54° 40' or fight," that is to say, the limits suggested by Russia. The treaty of 1846, however, gave to Great Britain all to the north of 49°, and Vancouver's Island besides.

Had the American claim been carried out, England would have possessed but one opening to the Pacific, namely, Simpson's River. A Russian fort would have guarded the entrance on the north, while an American one threatened it on the south.

The strip of coast in the possession of Russia is, however, for the most part actually in British occupation. The whole of the British territory in that quarter, up to the time of the establishment of British Columbia, was under the management of the Hudson's Bay Company, and in 1839 they took a lease from the Russian Fur Company of the Russian coast as high up as Cross Sound, in latitude 58°. Sir GEORGE SIMPSON, the Governor of Hudson's Bay, says:—

"The British territory runs along inland from the coast about thirty miles; the Russian territory runs along the coast; we have the right of navigation through the rivers to the heart of the interior country. A misunderstanding existed upon that point in the first instance; we were about to establish a post upon one of the rivers, which led to very serious difficulties between the Russian American Company and ourselves: we had a long correspondence, and, to guard against the recurrence of these difficulties, it was agreed that we should lease this margin of coast, and pay them a rent."

He adds that they have the whole care of this territory, in which there are no Russian officers.

In 1854, England was at war with Russia. It might have been expected that the occasion would have been seized to recover the territory we had so unaccountably lost. But this was not done: on the contrary, an arrangement was made to protect Russia. Sir GEORGE SIMPSON, in his evidence before the House of Commons, says:—

"Q. 1738. Mr. LABOUCHERE: During the late war which existed between Russia and England, I believe that some arrangement was made between you and the Russians, by which you agreed not to molest one another?"

"Yes, such an arrangement was made."

"1739. By the two Companies?—Yes; and Government confirmed the arrangement."

"1740. You agreed that on neither side should there be any molestation or interference with the trade of the different parties?—Yes."

"1741. And I believe that was strictly observed during the whole war?—Yes."

"1742. Mr. BELL: Which Government confirmed the arrangement: the Russian or the English, or both?—Both Governments."

The connexion between the Russian Fur Company and the Hudson's Bay Company, that is to say, between the Russian and the English Governments, is now avowed to have subsisted in time of war, and one of the Ministry appointed to carry on that war with vigour makes an opportunity of bringing that fact prominently before a Parliamentary Committee. The mischief does not, however, end even here. According to Sir GEORGE SIMPSON, it appears that in making out the lease of Russian territory, a very important position on the British side of the boundary has been recognised as Russian.

His description of the territory included in the lease is thus brought out, and again by Mr. LABOUCHERE:—

"1026. Besides your own territory, I think you administer a portion of the territory which belongs to Russia, under some arrangement with the Russian company?—There is a margin of coast marked yellow in the map, from 54° 40' up to Cross Sound, which we have rented from the Russian American Company for a term of years."

"1027. Is that the whole of that strip?—The strip goes on to Mount St. Elias."

"1028. Where does it begin?—Near Fort Simpson, in latitude 54°; it goes up to Mount St. Elias, which is further north."

"1029. Is it the whole of that strip which is included between the British territory and the sea?—We have only rented the part between Fort Simpson and Cross Sound."

We look at the map, and we find that Fort Simpson and all the land near it is British, according to the Treaty of St. Petersburg. Between it and the Russian territory rolls an arm of the sea, called Dixon's Entrance, terminating in Portland Channel, in latitude 56°. If Sir GEORGE SIMPSON meant to describe the territory on the Russian side of the water, it is inconceivable that he should have described it as being near a fort on the other side. If the Emperor of the FRENCH were to concede the line of railway from Calais to Paris

* Evide ce before a Select Committee of the House of Commons, 1857, Q. 1021.

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to the South-Eastern Company, they would scarcely describe the concession as commencing in the neighbourhood of Dover.

A correspondence is subjoined on this subject between the Committee and the Colonial Office, and another with Sir GEORGE SIMPSON. The former declines giving any information on the subject, and does so on the grounds of refusing to enter into a discussion which had not been proposed. Sir GEORGE SIMPSON gives an explanation which is an admission. This Committee sent to him the description of the boundary, copied from the Treaty. In his reply he describes the Russian boundary as an imaginary line, drawn, not at 54°, but at 54° 40'. The Russian territory, on the contrary, where it abuts upon the English, is always north of 55°. A reference to the fourth article of the treaty shows that the boundary is never an imaginary or a geocentric line, but is one drawn in a certain relation either to the indentation of the coast or to the position of the mountains.

Sir GEORGE SIMPSON has substituted for the boundary defined by the Treaty with England that constructively recognised by the Treaty with the United States, and, for an official document, the American description of it. He persists in his error, even when it is pointed out, and hopes it will do no harm, because "the boundary is defined by treaty, and has never been called in question."

The northern boundary originally proposed for the Colony of British Columbia was 55° north latitude. This would have deprived the colony of the navigation of Simpson's River, and would thus have concerned for some years any arrangements respecting the territory at its mouth, near Fort Simpson. Simpson's River has been made the actual boundary, and it is to be hoped that, as the article establishing British Columbia includes the country near Fort Simpson, there can be no dispute about the boundaries of that Colony. The strip of land, however, between Simpson's River and Portland Channel, though clearly British by the treaty, is not included within the boundaries of the Colony, and is included in the strip described by Sir GEORGE SIMPSON as rented by the Hudson's Bay Company from Russia. When, therefore, it is recollected what Russia has already obtained on this coast by a claim void of any foundation, it is impossible to ignore the danger that may arise from a claim that has already met with a recognition however informal and unauthorised. It seems, therefore, to be desirable that a statement of the case should be made at the opening of the next session, in the form of a petition to Parliament, to appoint a select committee to inquire into this case, and to obtain the production of the papers respecting the negotiation of the Treaty of 1825, and respecting any negotiations between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Russian American Fur Company, and between the English and the Russian Governments.

CORRESPONDENCE

WITH THE GOVERNOR OF HUDSON'S BAY.

No. 1.

London, August 13, 1858.

Sir,—In the evidence given by you before a Committee of the House of Commons, in answer to question 1028, you state that the Hudson's Bay Company have for some time paid rent to Russia for territory commencing near Fort Simpson, in latitude 54°.

In the Boundary Treaty of 1825, between Russia and England, the boundary is defined as follows:—"Commencing from the southernmost point of the land called Prince of Wales Island, which point lies in the parallel of 54° 40' north latitude, and between 131° and 133° west longitude, the said line shall ascend to the north along Portland Channel, to the point where it strikes 55° north latitude."

Part of the territory the Hudson's Bay Company rents from Russia is thus south of the boundary line.

It appears, therefore, to this Committee that you recognise as Russian territory which is English, and that this recognition may, hereafter, endanger our safe navigation of Simpson's River. We shall feel much indebted if you can relieve us from our anxiety on this point, and show us that our fears are groundless.

I have, &c.,
H.E. Sir G. Simpson.

I have, &c.,
C. F. JONES, Secretary.

No. 2.

Hudson's Bay House, Lachine, October 28, 1858.

Sir,—Absence from home prevented my making an immediate reply to your letter of the 13th August last, wherein you call my attention to one of my replies before the House of Commons Committee on Hudson Bay Affairs (No. 1028), in which I incidentally mention that the Russian boundary on the Pacific coast was in latitude 54°.

It does not appear to me that strict accuracy was required in the matter, as my notice of the boundary was simply to give the Committee an idea of the extent of territory we leased from the Russians. No imaginary International boundary is perhaps so well known, on this continent as that of Russia on the north-west coast, in consequence of the extreme party in the United States having claimed all territory on that coast up to 54° 40', at the time of the discussion of the Oregon Treaty. It became a popular cry, "fifty-four, forty, or fight."

It is just possible I may have omitted the *minutes* in my answer to the Com-

mittee; although it is, I think, more probable that the short-hand reporter did not catch the exact figures. Whoever may be to blame, I trust no serious consequences may arise from the error, inasmuch as the boundary is defined by treaty, and has never, to my knowledge, been called in question by England, Russia, the United States, or any other nation interested in the matter.

Your obedient Servant,
G. SIMPSON.

Charles Jones, Esq., Secretary.

No. 3.

London, Feb. 27, 1859.

Sir,—We have the honour to acknowledge your letter of the 28th October, and have to thank you for the courtesy with which you have treated so captious a criticism as that which you attribute to us.

Our objection, however, applies equally to your statement, whether it was "that it is Russian boundary on the Pacific coast was in latitude 54°" or 54° 40'.

The Russian boundary, as defined by the Treaty of St. Petersburg (Feb. 28, 1825), never touches British land except to the north of the 56th parallel. It is in no place an "imaginary" or geocentric line, but is first an arm of the sea, and then a line sometimes less, but never more, than ten marine leagues from the sea. You do not contradict this statement, made by us in the form of a quotation from the Treaty, and yet you speak as if the actual boundary were the parallel marked 54° 40'.

We are bewildered by this contradiction, and can explain it only by supposing that you have taken, instead of the Treaty, the popular idea of it which prevails in the United States.

Our alarm, however, was excited, not by your mention of the 54°, but of Fort Simpson. The land near Fort Simpson must mean the land on the British side of Dixon's Entrance. We cannot suppose that you would have thus described any of the territory on the other side.

We would request to know whether any part of the strip you rent from Russia extends to the south or east of Portland Channel, or of the arm of the sea which extends thence westward to Dixon's Entrance. I enclose a *Memorandum* on the encroachments made by Russia on the British territory on the north-west coast of America, by which you will see the danger which will have accrued from the lease of the Hudson's Bay Company, should that be as you have described it.

I have, &c.,

C. F. JONES, Sec.

H.E. Sir G. Simpson.

WITH THE COLONIAL OFFICE.

No. 1.

The Committee call the attention of the Colonial Secretary (August 31, 1858) to the evidence of Sir G. SIMPSON, and request that, if possible, he will relieve them from their anxiety and show them that their fears are groundless.

No. 2.

Mr. H. MERVILLE replies (October 8), that: "in describing the position of the Russian boundary, Sir GEORGE SIMPSON uses the words 'in latitude 54°' as comprising the whole of that degree up to latitude 55°, which Sir EDWARD BELWIER LYTTON apprehends to be in accordance with the usual language."

No. 3.

The Committee reply (Oct. 14), that Sir GEORGE SIMPSON speaks of the strip rented from Russia as beginning near Fort Simpson; that Fort Simpson with the land near it is separated from Russia by an arm of the sea, the boundary indicated by the Treaty. In order to know whether British territory has been recognised as Russian, they request to know "what are the terms used in the lease by which the strip of land is defined which the Hudson's Bay Company rent from the Russian American Company."

No. 4.

Downing-street, November 12, 1858.

Sir,—With reference to your note of the 14th ult., I am directed by Secretary Sir E. BELWIER LYTTON to acquaint you that he cannot undertake to supply you with extracts, or with descriptions of the terms of leases held by the Hudson's Bay Company. I am further desired to state that, without interfering any discountenance to you, as, indeed, the previous correspondence will testify, Sir E. B. LYTTON must explain that, while ready to give any information in his power to individuals whose private interests are concerned, and when the inquiry is made for occasional or special purposes, he considers it inconsistent with the public interest, and, therefore, not compatible with his duty, to maintain a systematic discussion of policy with private persons on the respective territorial rights of this and of foreign nations.

I am, Sir, your obedient Servant,

Charles Jones, Esq.

CARNARVON.

No. 5.

November 23, 1858.

EXTRACT:—

The statement of Sir GEORGE SIMPSON was apparently so improbable that we should not have ventured to bring it to your notice had it been made by any other person. Receiving it from such an authority, it was our duty to obtain from you, if possible, an authoritative contradiction, and, had such been possible, we cannot doubt that you would have given it. In so doing you would only have been following the rule laid down by yourself in a letter to the Secretary of the Staigbridge Committee, to give information in all cases where it is "desirable on public grounds that no misconception should exist."

We are, therefore, driven to the conclusion that the Hudson's Bay Company have, so far as their agreement with the Russian Fur Company can effect it, made a sacrifice of British territory, and that the idea of resisting an anticipated Russian claim is so embarrassing to you that you wish to avoid the subject.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

C. F. JONES, Sec.

Right Hon. Sir E. B. Lytton, M.P.

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Your obedient servant,
G. SIMPSON.

London, Feb. 27, 1859.
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Your obedient servant,
CARRINGTON.

November 23, 1858.
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